



Weekend Australian, Australia

21 Apr 2012, by Jo Studdert

Property, page 1 - 1,684.72 cm²

National - circulation 295,066 (S)

ID 142533944

BRIEF RAIA_METRO

INDEX 1

PAGE 1 of 5

Lean, green cities of the future

Rising costs demand radical rethink of our urban environment {P6}

Architect paints vision of suburbs in the sky

YOUNG Melbourne architect Ben Statkus was chosen to display his futuristic urban designs in the Australian pavilion at the 2010 Venice Biennale.

The topic for the exhibition was "Now and when: what Australian cities might look like in 2050".

"The brief was to imagine something unimaginable," Statkus says.

"We wanted to leave the realm of what we understand now, for if we started with ideas about how we do things now, we'd end up with something that was from today. We decided to postulate a scenario where the world's scientists had made a breakthrough in our understanding of gravity, opening up the possibility of utilising the airspace of our cities for increased population growth without increased peripheral urban spread."

To decide what kind of environment was possible, and how people would live in it, he and his team looked back into history, even to 2000 years ago, searching for what was consistent among different urban solutions. "Fashions come and go but we were looking for what stayed the same. One clear one was that people like to live close together. That's not so common in Australia: we have a lot of urban sprawl, so we put these three things together — the lack of gravity, urban sprawl, and the desire to be close — and imagined a city where we went upwards, generating floating suburbs, linked to ground-based ones," he says.

People would be able to choose to live in houses on the ground or in floating suburbs.

The entry was called How Does It Make You Feel? and sought to envisage how people in the two different spaces would regard each other and the connections between them, and how the two could integrate.

The design didn't go into detail about the internal or external structures but concentrated on the idea of a city — an analogy of a city.

Statkus says the clusters of dwellings create something rather like a country town or a medieval city, where density levels vary and there are lots of little shops interspersed with residences and businesses, creating an organic

community. On the ground, all roads have vanished, reverting to trails and goat tracks; old freeways have been planted out to bush. Getting rid of the whole network and infrastructure of transport as we know it opened a world of possibilities for the designer.

In this imagined world, "human-operated transport is a thing of the past. Self-organising transport pods move people around the city, hovering above the ground plane, within the new floating cities and in between, enabling the traveller to enjoy the ride," the design notes explain. "Cloud cities cool the buildings below through strategic overshadowing, reducing evaporation in our water reservoirs and enabling crops that are not currently possible to be grown.

"Overshadowing, once considered a planning faux pas, has become desirable; property is highly sought after where strategic overshadowing is present," the notes say.

The six designs illustrating facets of the city can be seen at www.statkusarchitecture.com.au/project-venice.html.

The images show urban clusters, transport pods that can dock anywhere, and how the floating suburbs look from beneath and from eye level.

JO STUDDERT



AARON FRANCIS

Ben Statkus